

SSG William J. Gonyo

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Oshkosh Youth, Member Of Flying Fortress Crew, Is Home from War in Africa

Pity the soldier who had to spend New Year's eve in a fox-hole!

That misgiving seemed to bother Staff Sgt. William J. Gonyo, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Gonyo, 288 Ceape street, more than the 50 flights he made over enemy territory as a side gunner in a famed Flying Fortress.

Now home on a 30-day furlough, Sergeant "Bill" arrived Friday, shortly after noon, looking fit as a fiddle, a little nervous perhaps but then who wouldn't feel jittery after living in an army air base in mountains and desert since December of last year.

In chronological order, Bill left Oshkosh in January of 1942 after enlisting in the air corps and furthered his education in camps and fields spotted all over the nation. He studied and trained at Chanute Field, Ill., Boeing aircraft plant at Seattle, Wash., Tampa, Fla., Boise, Idaho, where he got his "wings," Topeka, Kan., Salina, Kan., and West Palm Beach, Fla.

Assigned to Africa

He left for Africa Dec. 21, 1942, and enroute visited South America. For two months his plane operated out of a desert base and later from a mountain field in Africa.

New Year's eve he said he spent in a foxhole during an axis raid on the field in the desert and said he spent his time thinking of the folks back home enjoying themselves in the traditional American fashion.

That brought Bill up to combat action. His plane, a B-17 (Flying Fortress) went under the name of "Yankee Queen" and staged 50 successful flights over Middle Eastern targets and when Bill left the plane in June "it was good for 50 more," he said.

The amazing story about the "Yankee Queen," according to Bill, was that in the 50 flights, attacks by enemy planes and anti-aircraft numbered 35 to 40, but not one of the 12 men of the crew was injured.

Queen Lives On

To add to the popular title "Queens Die Proudly," Bill revealed that their "Queen" lives proudly on. On one occasion over Italy just a score of miles from Rome, anti-aircraft fire had so badly damaged the "Queen" that the commanding officer ordered the plane abandoned. But the pilot

beseached the men to stick with the ship and he brought it back safely to the port, four hours flying time away, with one motor dead and another of the four badly vibrating.

Operating on its first flights as the rear ship in flights that sometimes numbered 175 planes, the "Yankee Queen" soon moved up in position and in the last 20 operations was the lead ship.

True to colors, Bill preferred to talk more of his ship than himself.

Bill is 23, a graduate of Oshkosh High school, class of '38, and, in his own words, "never indulged in sports, music or other divisions as I was too busy working." He worked for a news agency and prior to his enlistment worked for two and a half years at the Wisconsin Axle division.

Out of the seven ships his plane accounted for, Bill has one sure hit to his credit. He related that he downed an Italian Macchi 202 over Sardinia in one of the raids. He added that most of the attacking planes were German Focke-Wulfe and ME 109's.

In Tunisian Campaign

The sorties that the "Yankee Queen" took part in were over all the familiar axis-held and present axis-operated ports and fields. Sicily's ports, those on Cardinia, Corsica and Italy, are among the latter flight raids while previous to those former axis-held fields in Tunisia had been targets.

He took part in raids on axis positions in the final stages of the Tunisian campaign. When this campaign was over, the Oshkosh youth began his trek homeward in the skyways that crossed the Atlantic Bay of Biscay, England, Scotland, the north seas, Ireland and finally the North American continent.

Bill wears the ribbons denoting his flights with oak leaves for each five flights. Other ribbons denote good behavior, partaking in the major raids and seeing action in the African theater.

The distinguished flying cross is coming Bill's way for "meritorious achievement and coolness during raids under fire."

Following his furlough he has a choice of going to officer's candidate school or to be an instructor.

"I don't feel much like being an instructor," Bill commented. "I never flew in a plane until I joined the army."

T/Sgt. William J. Gonyo, 288 Ceape street, was with the 2224th army air forces base unit. He served in the battles of Tunis and Sicily. He was decorated with the distinguished flying cross, the good conduct medal, the air medal with nine oak leaf clusters, the European-African theater ribbon with two service stars, the good conduct medal and the purple heart award.

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Gonyo, William (Bill)

William (Bill) James Gonyo died at Aurora Medical Center on Friday, November 16, 2012 at the age of 93.

Bill was born on October 4, 1919 in the Town of Aurora, Waushara County to James and Eva (Rodencal) Gonyo. He attended



country school in rural Berlin and moved to Oshkosh with his family in 1927 when he was in the third grade.

He attended and graduated from Oshkosh High School in June 1938. Bill then was employed at Rockwell International from October 1939 to December 1941 when he enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps two weeks after Pearl Harbor was bombed.

After ten months of overseas training Bill was assigned as a waist gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress, the Yankee Queen. He landed in Africa on Christmas Day 1942 and flew the first of 50 bombing missions in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and Naples, Italy. As an aerial gunner, he attained the rank of Staff Sergeant. Upon returning to the United States in mid-June 1943 he was assigned to Kingman Army Air Base in Kingman, Arizona, where he was in charge of a group of aerial gunnery instructors.

He was discharged as a Technical Sergeant from Sparta, Wisconsin on September 22, 1945. Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with nine oak leaf clusters, the European (Africa) Campaign medal with two battle stars, the American Defense medal, the American campaign medal, and the Victory and Good Conduct medal.

After his years in the military he returned to Rockwell International for a short period of time. On January 1, 1946, he was appointed as a Patrolman on the Oshkosh Police Department. On May 3, 1947 Bill married Geraldine N. Ruhl. They celebrated 61 years together before her death in 2008.

In 1968, following an intensive and rigorous investigative and nomination process, Bill was appointed to and graduated from the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

He progressed through the ranks of the Oshkosh Police Department and on October 30, 1972 was appointed Chief of Police of the Oshkosh Police Department. After serving over 35 years on the department he retired on March 1, 1981. Following his retirement Bill worked part-time as a security guard at the EAA Museum, where he made many friends. He retired from the museum when he turned 80.

In 1989 Bill attended his first bomber reunion at which time nine of the ten crew members of the Yankee Queen were present. This was the first time in over 40 years that the crew was together again. He attended all subsequent reunions and was the sole surviving member of his crew.

Bill was active in nu-

merous organizations as a board member of the Boys and Girls Club, the Wisconsin Juvenile Officers' Association, the International Chiefs of Police Association, and was a lifetime member of the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association.

Bill and Ed Misch of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department were two of the first instructors to teach in the Criminal Justice Program conducted by Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton. Bill recalls no fancy classroom as the classes were held in the attic of a Lutheran church in Appleton.

At age 92 Bill remained in touch with his former police officers with a weekly lunch at a local restaurant and a monthly breakfast at the Fin and Feather with former police colleagues from the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department and the Neenah, Menasha, and Oshkosh Police Departments.

Bill became the head of the first centralized record bureau of the police department under Chief William Goltz. As a Lieutenant under Chief Harry Guenther Bill started the first Youth Aid Bureau and from that started the first detective bureau along with Captain Cyril Boushelle. Bill also started the first school crossing guard program in 1953.

Survivors include two daughters, Paula (Danny) Cartwright and Julie (Tom) Kumbier; three grandchildren, Jeremy Kumbier of Oshkosh, Jacki (Bill) Curry of LaCrosse, and Kayla Kumbier of Oshkosh; two step-grandchildren, Andy (Kim) Cartwright of Escanaba and Ann of Oshkosh; two great-grandsons, Justus and Malachi Curry; and two step-great-grandchildren, Samantha and Alex Cartwright. Also surviving is a brother Newell of Milwaukee and numerous nephews and nieces.

Preceding Bill in death were his parents, James and Eva (Rodencal) Gonyo; brother and sister-in-law George and Helen (Piechowski) Gonyo; sister and brother-in-law Ruth (Lester) Friday; sister and brother-in-law Catherine (Carroll) Thill; sister-in-law Anne Gonyo; and brother and sister-in-law Douglas and Lois Ruhl.

The family would like to thank Gabriel's Villa and Aurora Medical Center for their loving and tender care. In lieu of flowers of memorial has been established.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Bill will be held on Monday November 19, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. at St. Jude - St. Vincent Church (216 W South Park Ave) with Fr Bill Van De Kreeke officiating. Visitation will be from 9:00 a.m. to the time of Mass. Interment will be at Riverside Cemetery with military honors.



